

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2023

Hon. Kathy Hochul
Governor
New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader
New York State Senate
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl Heastie
Speaker
New York State Assembly
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, 932
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

We write in support of public housing tenants and public housing authorities (“PHA”) across the State of New York, who are seeking rental relief due to the lingering issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early in the pandemic, the Federal government recognized that the crisis would disproportionately impact the financial well being of the America’s renters.¹ Incomes fell for about half of all renters during the COVID-19 pandemic.² Those losses were larger among renter households headed by people of color, those with lower incomes, and younger people.³ Through no fault of their own, these individuals and families were suddenly forced to choose between the heartbreaking choice paying their rent and paying for other basic necessities such as food, medicine, and childcare.

¹ Airgood-Obrycki, Whitney. “Renters’ Response to Financial Stress During the Pandemic.” *Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University*. Pg. 1. (April 2021).

² Id.

³ Id.

To help meet the financial obligations of America’s renters, and to keep them stably housed, Congress created the Emergency Rental Assistance (“ERA”) Program. Administered through the U.S. Treasury Department, the ERA Program provided state, territorial, tribal, and local governments with more than \$46 billion to support housing stability through the pandemic.⁴ Through two separate disbursements, the State of New York received more than \$2.29 billion.⁵ This ERA Program award was essential to preventing mass rental evictions throughout the state.

However, for reasons that remain unclear, the State of New York essentially deprioritized PHA and Section 8 tenants. This decision has been devastating for the tens of thousands of public housing tenants who are now facing significant rental arrears, which may be impossible for some to ever pay back. In some cases, some of these tenants are faced with the painful prospect of eviction due to their non-payment of rent.

At the same time, PHAs are dependent on residents’ rental payments to balance their budgets and meet their operational needs. PHAs across the State continue to struggle with increased expenses and significant losses of rental income—suffered both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic—and are being faced with the challenge of potentially cutting services, laying off workers, and discontinuing other needed services if an infusion of rental assistance for PHA and Section 8 tenants is not provided in the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 New York State budget.

As an example, it is our understanding that residents who live in the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) have amassed pandemic-related rent arrears in excess of \$485 million and the other housing authorities across the State estimate that their arrears are approximately \$41 million.⁶ Some NYCHA residents applied for a total of \$128 million in ERAP relief, but to-date, they have not received any funding assistance.⁷ Other NYCHA residents chose not to apply, because they knew it was unlikely they would ever receive ERAP assistance.

We are encouraged to see that the State Assembly and the State Senate have both included rental assistance funding for Public Housing and Section 8 tenants in their one-house budgets to relieve the aforementioned issues. As you proceed with your budget negotiations, we urge that the Executive and Legislature come together to support our common constituents and the housing authorities that serve them by including important emergency rental assistance funding in the State’s final budget for FY 2024.

We look forward to hearing from you as we work towards a positive resolution that will benefit New York’s affordable housing residents.

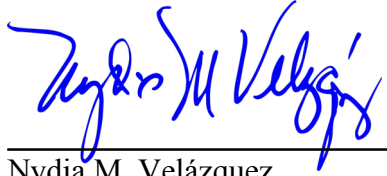
⁴ U.S. Department of Treasury. “Emergency Rental Assistance Program.” <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/emergency-rental-assistance-program>. (Last Accessed on April 3, 2023).

⁵ U.S. Department of Treasury. “Emergency Rental Assistance Program, Allocations and Payments.” <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/emergency-rental-assistance-program/allocations-and-payments>. (Last Accessed on April 3, 2023).

⁶ Excel Spreadsheet: NYCHA (2022). NYCHA Rent Arrears Total_Nov 2022 – federal delegation. NYCHA.

⁷ The NYCHA Journal. 2023. “NYCHA Community Calls on the State to Fund Emergency Rental Assistance for Public Housing Tenants.” 28 March. <https://nychajournal.nyc/nycha-community-calls-on-the-state-to-fund-emergency-rental-assistance-for-public-housing-tenants/>. (Last Accessed on April 3, 2023).

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



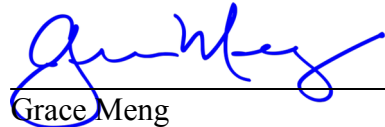
Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



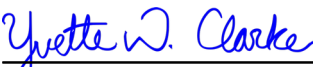
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
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Yvette D. Clarke
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Gregory W. Meeks
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